California Native Plant Society
East Bay Chapter
Conservation Committee

October 26, 2007

Mr. Mehdi Morshed, Executive Director
Mr. Dan Leavitt, Deputy Director
California High-Speed Rail Authority, EIR/EIS Comments
925 L Street, Suite 1425
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Comments on *Draft Bay Area to Central Valley High Speed Train (HST) Program Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Impact Statement (EIR/EIS)*

Dear Mr. Morshed and Mr. Leavitt:

The East Bay Chapter of the California Native Plant Society (EBCNPS) appreciates the opportunity to comment on the *Draft Bay Area to Central Valley High Speed Train (HST) Program Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Impact Statement (EIR/EIS)*. The California Native Plant Society (CNPS) is a non-profit organization of more than 10,000 laypersons and professional and academic botanists organized into 32 chapters throughout California. The mission of CNPS is to increase the understanding and appreciation of California's native plants and to preserve them in their natural habitat through scientific activities, education, and conservation. O010-1

Pursuant to the mission of protecting California's native flora and vegetation, EBCNPS submits the following comments to the DEIR:

General Comments

The proposed high speed rail project presents an enticing and exciting solution for intercity travel from the Bay Area to the Central Valley. While EBCNPS is supportive of a low-emissions public transit system, we find the HST project presented in the DEIR, with its goal of developing thousands of miles of high speed rail track on thousands of acres of open land, to be extremely troubling for a number of reasons. O010-2

First and foremost, we are concerned that this project is likely not to gain the public support necessary to make it viable. A project of this magnitude requires overwhelming public support for its economic requirements and goals to be realized. The average price of tickets, estimated ridership, and costs of maintenance and marketing must all be revealed for public analysis. The July 2007 paper entitled *Bay Area/California High-Speed Rail Ridership and Revenue Forecasting Study* (Cambridge Systematics, Inc.) offers some information about assumptions, yet the paper notably becomes confusing where the information is the most critical. One notable obfuscation is presenting *no project alternative* ridership data in riders/day, whereas most O010-3

estimates for the HST ridership are in riders/year. We feel this paper fails to graphically illustrate how costs and ridership are calculated, therefore requiring readers to flip back and forth through the document to try to understand its essential points. Our best assumption is that this document was not designed for the layperson. O010-3 Cont.

The worst possible scenario EBCNPS foresees is failure of the project due to lack of public support after construction of thousands of miles of track but before the first train ever hits the steel. Given the way the information is presented, we believe this is a highly probable outcome of this visionary project. O010-4

We also find that fire is notably omitted from the EIR analysis. We live in a fire-adapted, fire-prone landscape. Over 100,000 acres have burned in recent fires just in the month of October. It is impossible to imagine that a train moving at speeds of over 200 miles per hour with direct metal-on-metal contact would not increase fire danger. Vegetation maintenance is essential for minimizing wildfire risk, but there is little mention of this cost and how the HSR will address increased fire risk created by this project in a fire-prone environment. O010-5

We consider the air travel estimates extrapolated from the year 2000 to be both **inappropriate and inadequate**. The above referenced *Ridership and Revenue Forecasting Study* (Table 4.1) shows a 16% **decrease** in annual intrastate airline passengers. The DEIR document fails to consider this downturn in intrastate airline travel (Table 1.2-2). Instead, the DEIR shows an enormous increase in intrastate air travel—about 77% over a 15-year period—based on two data points for intrastate air travel in 1992 and 2000. From a statistical point of view, fitting a line (in this case the air travel estimate) from just two points is absolutely unacceptable. It is regrettable that any "authority" that prides itself on science and analysis would use two data points eight years apart to extrapolate use for the next 20 years. O010-6

S-1.2.3 Regional Need Comments

A. Regional Growth - Population growth assumptions can be reasonably modeled with the current dataset. Growth projections show that the population of California will increase in the next thirty years. But the advancement of computers, the internet, and telecommuting, coupled with the long-term pressure of rising fuel costs, might lead consumers and employees to work and make purchases from home rather than take public transit to work or to shop. How are these factors calculated into the ridership model? Are the assumptions realistic considering that telecommuting is becoming easier and more widespread with time? An analysis for increased telecommuting is essential to avoid overestimating ridership numbers. O010-7

B. Regional Congestion – It is well documented that with increased congestion and high density infrastructure, there are greater opportunities for economically successful public transit systems. The core questions are: How much regional congestion is caused by local traffic, and how can improvements in local transit systems ameliorate traffic by regional travelers? For instance, the Bay Area's BART system is commonly noted as one of the O010-8

most economically profitable transit systems, probably due to the high population density of the area. EBCNPS believes the HSR authority might be sending a confused message about the HST's target ridership, because the proposed HST system is intended to move riders longer distances rather than deal with localized traffic problems. If the heaviest traffic is caused by drivers traveling less than the distance between two HST stops, the proposed high-speed rail system will not rectify regional traffic problems. O010-8 Cont.

C. Economic Implications – It is not clear that employers will move jobs out of regions with increased traffic congestion. Smart employers typically maintain business in an area where they can attract good employees. With additional work communication options such as telecommuting, the employer may well favor employee base and proximity to consumers over traffic congestion as factors for determining the location of an office. O010-9

D. Environmental Implications - EBCNPS commends the idea of transit-oriented development, but mixed use development is ultimately the best choice. Living and working locally is a more sustainable long-term solution than providing resources by which people can easily commute 100+ miles a day. Again, the assumption that regional transit will be more important than local transit is not well explained or analyzed. O010-10

S-1.4.12 Growth Impacts

This section claims that the growth inducing impact of the Altamont Pass network is a mere 2.2% population increase. EBCNPS is not convinced that growth impacts can be determined accurately given that there is no model community with a recently developed HST system. It would be more instructive to give examples that span a range of least effect to greatest effect on growth. For example, the city of Manteca is reasonably affordable and growing at an unprecedented rate. The way the HST would affect this community versus a developed Oakland or a less-developed Livermore is extremely important towards understanding the rider community and anticipated environmental impacts from the project. O010-11

3.15 Biological Resources and Wetlands

East Bay to Central Valley Corridor

Special Status Species
Special Status Plants

A number of plant species that are considered rare have not been included in the Altamont Pass species list. Some of these species are so rare they do not have status yet (for example, *Deinandra bacigalupii* – Livermore tarplant), while others are locally rare and their populations serve as important range extensions for the species. The preservation of a species at the edge of its natural range is extremely important for conservation botany and these species need to be included in the EIR and project impacts. Attached to these comments is a list of rare and unusual plants from the Livermore Valley that should be included in the EIR. O010-12

The draft EIR misspells the common name of Diablo helianthelia (sic); the correct spelling is Diablo helianthella. O010-13

Special Management Areas

A certain broad scale of analysis is appropriate for this initial document given its programmatic nature, but the exclusion of the East Bay Regional Park District (EBRPD) in this section of the report is notable. EBRPD manages over 96,000 acres in the two-county "East Bay." EBRPD manages sensitive lands for plants and animals, yet the consultant only mentions the Nature Conservancy (TNC) in this regard. Other large landowners and managers of significant environments in this area include California State Parks, Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, the Livermore Area Recreation and Park District, and the Tri-Valley Conservancy. EBCNPS notes that the document is inadequate because it presents incorrect information by not including pertinent landowners and partners. O010-14

In addition, the DEIR fails to address most of the significant ongoing open space planning projects for the region that will be impacted. For instance, the cities of eastern Alameda County are initiating a conservation strategies program and the Bay Area Open Space Council's *Upland Habitat Goals Project* is looking at important conservation targets for the nine-county area. These projects plus others should be included in order to satisfy the environmental reviews due diligence requirement. O010-15

Concluding remarks

EBCNPS does not support this project because of the false assumptions and extrapolations made in estimating ridership, expenses, and benefits of building the system. We are also opposed to the concept of "linking" two geographic areas through undeveloped lands. The East Bay landscapes under consideration contain relatively unfragmented patches of high quality habitat and the existence and maintenance of these landscapes is a public good. The project EIR does not make its case that the proposed high-speed rail system would provide the benefits that it claims. O010-16

Thank you for your consideration of the above comments. Please do not hesitate to contact me with questions at (510) 734 0335.

Sincerely,

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California Native Plant Society
East Bay Chapter
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CEQA-Protected Rare and Unusual Plants of the Livermore Valley and Altamont Pass Regions 2005

(Statewide Rare Plants in Upper Case)

Rank in East Bay	Species	Common Name	Habitat
A2	Allenrolfea occidentalis	iodine bush	Alkali areas
A1	Allium crispum	crinkled onion	Dry Open Slopes; Serpentine; Misc. habitats
A2	Amsinckia eastwoodiae	Eastwood's fiddleneck	Grassland; Misc. habitats
*A1	AMSINCKIA GRANDIFLORA	large-flowered fiddleneck	Grassland; Sand or Sandstone; Misc. habitats
*A2	AMSINCKIA LUNARIS	bent-flowered fiddleneck	Grassland; Woodland; Misc. habitats
A1	Astragalus didymocarpus var. didymocarpus (A. gambelianus is more common)	two-seeded milkvetch	Grassland
*A1	ASTRAGALUS TENER VAR. TENER	alkali milk-vetch	Alkali areas; Grassland; Vernal Pools; Misc. Wetlands
A2	Atriplex argentea var. mohavensis	silverscale	Alkali areas
*A2	ATRIPLEX CORDULATA	heartscale	Alkali areas; Grassland; Misc. Wetlands
*A2	ATRIPLEX CORONATA VAR. CORONATA	crownscale	Alkali areas; Grassland; Vernal Pools
*A2	ATRIPLEX DEPRESSA	brittlescale	Alkali areas; Grassland; Misc. Wetlands
*A2	ATRIPLEX JOAQUINIANA	San Joaquin saltbush	Alkali areas; Grassland; Misc. Wetlands
A1	Atriplex subspicata	saltbush	Alkali areas
*A1	BALSAMORHIZA MACROLEPIS VAR. MACROLEPIS	big-scale balsamroot	Grassland; Serpentine
A1	Bidens laevis	bur-marigold	Freshwater Marsh; Misc. Wetlands
*A2	BLEPHARIZONIA PLUMOSA	big tarplant	Grassland; Scrub
A2	Carex nudata	torrent sedge	Rock, Tallus or Scree; Riparian; Sand or Sandstone areas
A2	Carex senta	rough sedge	Riparian areas; Misc. Wetlands
*A2	CENTROMADIA PARRYI SSP. CONGDONII (Hemizonia parryi ssp. congdonii in Jepson Manual)	Congdon's tarplant	Alkali areas; Grassland
A2	Chamaesyce ocellata ssp. ocellata	valley spurge	Sand or Sandstone
A1x	Chamomilla occidentalis (historical-1938) (C. suaveolens is more common)	valley pineapple weed	Alkali areas; Salt Marsh; Vernal Pools
A1	Collinsia bartsiifolia var. bartsiifolia	white Chinese houses	Sand or Sandstone
*A1	CORDYLANTHUS MOLLIS SSP. HISPIDUS	hispid bird's-beak	Alkali areas; Grassland
*A1	CORDYLANTHUS PALMATUS	palmate-bracted bird's-beak	Alkali areas; Grassland
A1	Cryptantha intermedia	common cryptantha	Forest; Rock, Tallus or Scree; Sand

			or Sandstone; Woodland
A1	Cucurbita foetidissima	calabazilla	Gravel; Rock, Tallus or Scree; Sand or Sandstone
A2	Cuscuta californica var. californica	California dodder	Chaparral; Grassland; Misc. habitats
A1	Cuscuta indecora var. indecora	pretty dodder	Misc. habitats
*A1	DEINANDRA BACIGALUPII	Livermore tarplant	Alkali areas
A1	Downingia bella	Hoover's downingia	Vernal Pools
A2	Downingia cuspidata	cuspidate downingia	Vernal Pools
A2	Downingia insignis	cupped downingia	Vernal Pools
A2	Elymus elymoides ssp. elymoides	squirreltail	Grassland
A2	Ericameria arborescens	golden-fleece	Chaparral; Forest; Woodland
A2	Eriogonum angulosum	angle-stemmed eriogonum	Sand or Sandstone; Misc. habitats
A2	Eriogonum luteolum var. luteolum	golden carpet	Gravel; Sand or Sandstone; Serpentine
*A2	ERODIUM MACROPHYLLUM	round-leaved filaree	Grassland; Scrub
*A2	FRITILLARIA AGRESTIS	stinkbells	Alkali areas; Grassland
*A2	HESPEREVAX CAULESCENS (H. sparsiflora is more common)	hogwallow starfish	Vernal Pools
A1	Heterodraba unilateralis	heterodraba	Grassland
A2	Hordeum depressum	low barley	Alkali areas; Vernal Pools; Misc. Wetlands
A2	Hordeum jubatum	foxtail barley	Misc. habitats
A1	Hutchinsia procumbens	prostrate hutchinsia	Alkali areas
A1	Juncus ambiguus	toad-rush	Alkali areas; Brackish Marsh; Salt Marsh
A2	Juncus articulatus	jointed rush	Misc. habitats
A1	Lagophylla ramosissima ssp. congesta (ssp. ramosissima is more common)	hare's-ear	Misc. habitats
*A2	LASTHENIA FERRISIAE	Ferris's goldfields	Alkali areas; Vernal Pools
A2	Lasthenia fremontii	Fremont's goldfields	Vernal Pools; Misc. Wetlands
A2	Lasthenia minor	woolly goldfields	Grassland
A2	Layia chrysanthemoides	smooth layia	Grassland
A2	Lepidium dictyotum var. acutidens	sharp-toothed pepper-grass	Alkali areas
A1	Lepidium nitidum var. oreganum (var. nitidum is more common)	shining pepper-grass	Alkali areas; Vernal Pools; Misc. habitats
A2	Leptochloa fascicularis	bearded sprangletop	Misc. Wetlands
A1	Leptochloa uninervia	dense-flowered sprangle-top	Misc. Wetlands
*A1	LINANTHUS ACICULARIS	bristly linanthus	Chaparral; Grassland; Woodland
*A1	LINANTHUS GRANDIFLORUS	large-flowered linanthus	Grassland; Gravel; Sand or Sandstone; Scrub
A1	Linanthus liniflorus	flax-flowered linanthus	Scrub; Serpentine; Woodland; Misc. habitats
A2	Lithophragma parviflorum var. parviflorum	prairie star	Misc. habitats
A2	Lotus strigosus	strigose trefoil	Chaparral; Scrub
A1	Lupinus affinis	lupine	Misc. habitats
A2	Madia elegans ssp. vernalis (ssp. densifolia is more common)	common madia	Grassland
A2	Mentzelia affinis	Hydra stick-leaf	Grassland; Sand or Sandstone; Woodland

A1x	Mentzelia laevicaulis (historical-1969)	blazing star	Dry Washes; Rock, Tallus or Scree; Sand or Sandstone
A2	Microseris campestris	San Joaquin microseris	Grassland; Vernal Pools
A2	Microseris elegans	elegant microseris	Grassland; Vernal Pools
A2	Mimulus pilosus	downy monkeyflower	Dry Washes; Gravel; Riparian; Sand or Sandstone
A2	Minuartia californica	California sandwort	Chaparral; Dry Open Slopes; GrasslandRock, Tallus or Scree; Sand or Sandstone; Serpentine
A1x	Monolopia lanceolata (historical-1941)	common monolopia	Chaparral; Dry Open Slopes; Grassland; Woodland
*A1	MYOSURUS MINIMUS SSP. APUS	little mousetail	Alkali areas; Freshwater Marsh; Vernal Pool
A2	Myosurus minimus ssp. minimus	common mouse-tail	Freshwater Marsh; Vernal Pools
A2	Myosurus sessilis	sessile mouse-tail	Grassland; Vernal Pools
*A2	NAVARRETIA COTULIFOLIA	cotula navarretia	Misc. Wetlands
A1	Nicotiana attenuata	coyote tobacco	Dry Open Slopes
A2	Nicotiana quadrivalvis	Indian tobacco	Dry Open Slopes; Dry Washes
A1	Nitrophila occidentalis	nitrophila	Alkali areas
A2	Orobanche bulbosa	bulbous broom-rape	Chaparral
A2	Orobanche vallicola	California broom-rape	Forest; Woodland
A2	Penstemon heterophyllus var. purdyi	foothill penstemon	Chaparral; Forest; Grassland
A2	Petunia parviflora	wild petunia	Dry Washes
A2	Phacelia ramosissima var. ramosissima	branching phacelia	Dry Open Slopes; Dry Washes; Grassland; Misc. habitats
A2	Phacelia tanacetifolia	tansy phacelia	Gravel; Sand or Sandstone
A1	Phyla nodiflora var. incisa (var. nodiflora is more common)	narrow-leaved fog-fruit	Misc. Wetlands
A2	Pilularia americana	pillwort	Vernal Pools; Misc. Wetlands
*A1	PLAGIOBOTHRYS GLABER	hairless popcorn flower	Alkali areas; Vernal Pools; Misc. Wetlands
A2	Plagiobothrys leptocladus	alkali plagiobothrys	Alkali areas
A2	Pleuropogon californicus	semaphore grass	Riparian areas; Misc. Wetlands
A1	Puccinellia nuttalliana	Nuttall alkali grass	Alkali areas
A2	Puccinellia simplex	little alkali grass	Alkali areas
A1x	Pyrrocoma racemosa var. racemosa (historical-1959)	racemose pyrrocoma	Alkali areas; Grassland; Salt Marsh; Misc. habitats
A2	Rumex salicifolius var. denticulatus	willow dock	Misc. Wetlands
A2	Salicornia subterminalis	Parish's glasswort	Alkali areas; Salt Marsh
A1	Scirpus fluviatilis	river bulrush	Misc. Wetlands
A2	Senecio flaccidus var. douglasii	shrubby butterweed	Dry Washes; Rock, Tallus or Scree; Sand or Sandstone
A2	Sesuvium verrucosum	sea-purslane	Alkali areas
A2	Spergularia macrotheca var. leucantha	large-flowered sand spurry	Alkali areas; Vernal Pools
A2	Spergularia macrotheca var. macrotheca	large-flowered sand spurry	Alkali areas; Coastal Bluff; Rock, Tallus or Scree; Misc. Wetlands
A2	Sporobolus airoides	alkali sacaton	Alkali areas
A2	Tonella tenella	small-flowered tonella	Riparian areas; Misc. habitats
A1	Torreyochloa pallida var. pauciflora	weak mannagrass	Freshwater Marsh; Riparian
A1?	Trifolium barbigerum var.	Gray's clover	Misc. habitats

	andrewsii(?)		
A2	Trifolium barbigerum var. barbigerum	bearded clover	Misc. habitats
*A1x	TRIFOLIUM DEPAUPERATUM VAR. HYDROPHILUM (Vars. amplectens and truncatum are more common)	saline clover	Alkali areas; Salt Marsh
A2	Trifolium flavulum (Included within T. fucatum in Jepson Manual)	bull clover	Alkali areas; Grassland; Serpentine; Misc. Wetlands
A1	Trifolium gambelii (Included within T. fucatum in Jepson Manual)	bull clover	Alkali areas; Grassland; Serpentine; Misc. Wetlands
A2	Trifolium lilacinum (Included within T. barbigerum var. andrewsii in Jepson Manual)	Gray's clover	Misc. habitats
*A1x	TROPIDOCARPUM CAPPARIDEUM (HISTORICAL-1981 BUT NOT SEEN SINCE THEN)	caper-fruited tropidocarpum	Alkali areas; Grassland
A2	Vicia hassei	slender vetch	Grassland; Scrub
A2	Vulpia microstachys var. microstachys (var. pauciflora is more common)	Nuttall's fescue	Dry Open Slopes; Rock, Tallus or Scree; Sand or Sandstone; Serpentine; Woodland

NOTE: Plant species followed by "(?)" have taxonomic or distribution problems and it is not clear if they occur here.

Dates indicated for historical species refer to last known record in the Alameda-Contra Costa Counties area.

Explanation of Ranks

***A1 or *A2**: Species in Alameda and Contra Costa counties listed as rare, threatened or endangered statewide by federal or state agencies or by the state level of CNPS.

A1x: Species previously known from Alameda or Contra Costa Counties, but now believed to have been extirpated, and no longer occurring here.

A1: Species currently known from 2 or less regions in Alameda and Contra Costa Counties.

A2: Species currently known from 3 to 5 regions in the two counties, or, if more, meeting other important criteria such as small populations, stressed or declining populations, small geographical range, limited or threatened habitat, etc.